

UDC 711

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THE STUDY OF URBAN IDENTITY OF THE SIBERIAN FEDERAL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Abstract: *The article presents a theoretical analysis of the phenomenon of identity in the context of psychological and pedagogical understanding of the importance of building and development of urban identity as a component of Krasnoyarsk social environment. By means of psychological methods and a sociological survey, the degree of urban identity of the Siberian Federal University students was investigated and compared with other types of social identity and its impact on social attitudes and the basic values in the urban environment.*

Keywords: *urban identity, Krasnoyarsk Territory, Siberia, social identity, mobility.*

Introduction

Identity has a range of interpretations in psychology: as a result of the “emotional and cognitive process of the unconscious identification of a person with a subject, group, or an object” (Encyclopedic Sociological Dictionary), or “individual’s acceptance of a certain role requirements arising from the subject in the process of personality formation.” E. Erikson defined identity as a personal experience of a (psychological) integrity, “internal belonging of a person in the continuity of self-explorations of personality.”

A person is unavoidably faced with “identity crises”, thus identity can be understood as a result of psychological adaptation to the social environment by accepting the society requirements in the process of individual development. Therefore, on the one hand, identity can be perceived as a set of social traits (even unconscious) of a person, and on the other hand, as an experience of integrity, as a result of “identity crises” involving self-understanding.

In sociological science the phenomenon of identity is studied from the position of society functioning, reproduction and changes in social norms and roles (T. Parsons, R. Park, E. Goffman, et al). In sociology identity is studied in order to model (or understand) a certain behavior of an individual that is of a social nature as a result of socialization. In modern theories of identity G. Baumeister, Z. Bauman, E. Giddens, N. Castells, A. Royce, S. Hall, and N. Elias focus on the factors of identity, examine the processes of identification in modern society when the conditions change and describe the features of identity. According to M. Castells, identity is a process by which a social actor learns about himself and constructs meanings “based on who they are or their ideas of who they are.” According to P. Berger, identity is an objectively existing structure, which expresses the true similarity (identity) and the difference between social (personal and group) subjects. Identity, on the one hand, is a static phenomenon that captures the state at a given time, and on the other hand – identity has a dynamic nature, i.e. can change over the time. M. Castells gives out two meanings in the concept of “identity”: “personal” identity as a result of adaptation to the environment, the product of internalization of an objective reality, which manifests itself, in particular, in the awareness of group membership; “classificational” identity as the perceived specificity of the object within a certain classification system (the category of perception (social) reality). Both of these meanings are in demand in the framework

of sociological discourse: the term “identity” is used not only to denote the social qualities of an individual, but also specificity of objects, which is perceived.

In the modern society, characterized by mobility and urbanization, there is a permanent transformation of the urban socio-cultural space. Urban identity is the result of a person’s identification with the urban community, the architectural structure of the city and the lifestyle of its inhabitants.

A number of scientists point out an analogy between regional and urban identity on the basis of territorial belonging. According to L.V. Smirnyagin, it is a “sense of social community with fellow countrymen...”, who either lived in the same territory in the past or live at the moment. Some scientists interpret the concept of “regional identity” as the relationship of the unique characteristics of a locality (city, village) which a city (or region) has and that “are created by the cultural life of the region.” Regional identity is, first of all, the meanings of the region i.e., the sense of social community that arises on the basis of a place of residence. It is based on symbolic capital: the perception of the territory by residents; their behavior relating to the territory (D. Vizgalov).

Methodology

Some researchers associate urban identity with the place uniqueness, its special spirit, defining it as an objective and subjective reality associated with such parameters as: conditions, location, climate, history, appearance of the city, its symbolism, events and traditions, the nature of communications within the territory, etc. Each city has unique interpretation and symbolic meanings of a “place” position. Designing ideas about the city features or uniqueness is an important resource and practical task, because the idea of the city brand may not always be adequate and significant for the city and its citizens with a positive urban identity.

Urban identity might be measured by different parameters:

Uniqueness, revealed in the residents’ ability to see the specific features and characteristics of the city;

Sense of place which means understanding of the certain territory referring to an external category (for example, Krasnoyarsk as a part of Siberia);

Positive perception of a place of residence, affection and love to a city for its cultural life and history;

Cohesion of the urban population, expressed in the fact that the residents have common interests and a sense of community, they are aware of the difficulties that may arise in the development of the territory, as well as the desire to solve them together.

Practical potential of identity which means that residents have self-organization, promote the strength of territorial identity, understand and agree with the strategy of the territory development.

The construction of a positive regional identity is a significant political, social and educational task and can be carried out through various activities, as well as through the promotion of urban attractions. Study of the urban identity and positioned values of the city of Krasnoyarsk can be presented as follows:

- Territory of residence.
- Modern city for comfortable living and professional development.
- Cultural and historical center.
- City of safe environment and friendly population (Siberians).
- Territory of sport and tourism.
- Unique natural area.
- Territory of industrial development.

Methods

The study involved 80 Bachelor’s and Master’s students of Siberian Federal University (19-45 years old). Popular cultural, natural, regional and economic symbols of urban stereotypes, as

well as mental and psychological peculiarities beyond ethnic features of inhabitants of Krasnoyarsk (Siberian character: hospitality, pride, strength) were used as identity markers.

Despite the urban identity degree, respondents of different age and gender assess the possibilities of professional self-realization in the city of Krasnoyarsk positively and highlight such terminal values as: “to have a happy family”, “to love and to be loved”, “to feel safe”, “to get a good job”, “to be financially independent”. At the same time, young people believe that “to become known and famous”, “to have power” and “to be healthy” are the values which are less likely to be implemented in the city.

The survey revealed that the majority of respondents have a positive attitude to the city of Krasnoyarsk – only 9% of the respondents feel irritated and dissatisfied, 5% have other feelings. More than a half have mixed or unspoken feelings. Only 10% are ashamed of their city. Distribution of answers are given in figures 1 and 2.

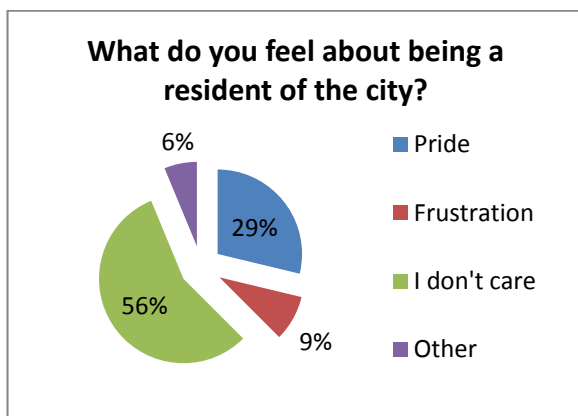


Figure 1. Survey outcomes

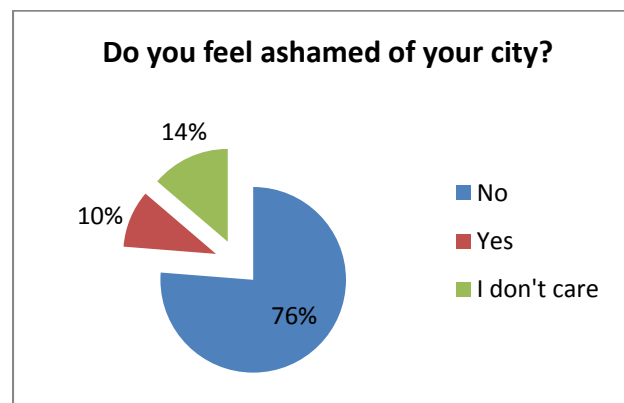


Figure 2. Survey outcomes

In the questionnaire students of SibFU were offered to arrange the proposed variants of social roles, answering the projective question “Who am I?”. Family roles “I am a daughter/son/sister/brother/wife/husband, etc.” rank first, as this type of identity is of an essential value for young people. The second position was taken by large regional identity “Siberian”, which might be explained by a pride from self-identification to a group of a traditionally distinct image with pronounced features. SibFU students segregate nationality (rank five) and citizenship (which took the third place). Being on a way of capacity building in a future career, Siberian Federal University students put the professional identity “I am a professional teacher/tutor/psychologist/sociologist, etc.” to the last position, and “I am a student” is in the fourth place. Urban identity “I am Krasnoyarsk resident” is on the last but one position. The survey results are visualized in Fig. 3.

The survey revealed that 30% of SibFU students’ regional identity (Krasnoyarsk citizen, Siberian) prevails over personal and social identity 50%, and 20% of the respondents put national identity in the first place in the hierarchy of their identities.

For the city of Krasnoyarsk, according to a survey among the students of Siberian Federal University, the most popular symbol is the “Stolby” Nature Reserve (33%). The second position is taken by the Yenisei river (25%). Paraskeva Pyatnitsa Chapel is a popular symbol because together with the image of the hydroelectric power station on the Yenisei river is depicted on the banknote of the Russian Federation (12%). Krasnoyarsk Flora and Fauna Park “Roer Ruchey” was chosen by 11% of students. Some respondents suggested their own answers: the symbol of the city of Krasnoyarsk is a sable, Gorky park, artist Vasily Surikov, the clock on the city municipality tower (the so-called “Krasnoyarsk Big Ben”).

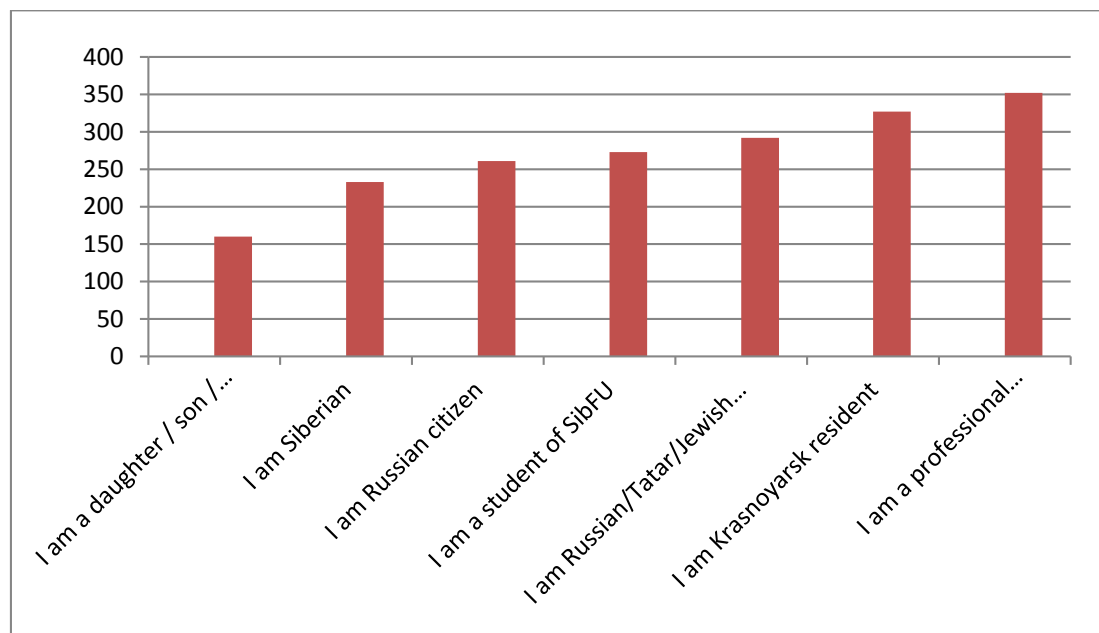


Figure 3. The range of identities of SibFU students

Conclusions

Despite the fact that the majority of respondents (76%) are proud to live in Krasnoyarsk, the following factors caused the interviewees' dissatisfaction: Krasnoyarsk is dirty, poor architecture, low culture. The indicator "bad ecology" was pointed out by all the respondents.

The majority of respondents (78%) associate the city of Krasnoyarsk with a territory in Siberia, and with the social community of people with distinctive features of the Siberian character, such as stamina, strong character, hospitality – 65%, with a unique natural environment (Yenisei, mountains, taiga)– 91%, with environmentally unfriendly place ("black sky", long winter, severe frost) – 77%. Approximately half of the interviewees (56%) consider Krasnoyarsk to be a million plus city with a modern urban infrastructure and cultural and historical center. Only onethird connects Krasnoyarsk with sports and tourism.

It can be summarized that when forming urban identity it is necessary to rely on socially significant city symbols.

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